

Surgery on toy animals lessens anxiety of veterinary students

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Training basic surgical techniques on toy animals before having to perform operations on living animals makes veterinary students much less anxious. At the same time, the use of laboratory animals is minimised. This is documented by a new PhD thesis from LIFE - the Faculty of Life Sciences at the University of Copenhagen.

A surgical skills laboratory, also known as the 'teddy laboratory', strengthens learning and the teaching environment.

The laboratory allows students to train basic surgical skills on toy animals designed to resemble and feel like real animals featuring, for example, organs, [veins and arteries](#).

"In comparison with performing surgical procedures on dead animals or laboratory animals, we can see that the students feel more confident learning the basic surgical techniques using toy animals. Anxiety hampers learning so it is hardly surprising that the greater sense of [confidence](#) among students has resulted in them having a much easier time learning and remembering the surgical techniques," says Rikke Langebæk, PhD and senior veterinary surgeon, who has developed the skills laboratory. She adds:

"Also, we want to do everything in our power to reduce the use of laboratory animals for teaching purposes."

Measurements of students' heart rate, questionnaires and interviews

show that after attending the 'teddy laboratory', students are considerably less fearful and better prepared for performing surgery on living animals.

Rikke Langebæk's interviews of students have identified four aspects of the models which are important: The visual, the dimensional, the tactile and the situational aspect. On a four-point so-called Likert scale (poor/reasonable/good/really good), 75% of students rated the toy animal models as being 'good' or 'really good' for learning surgical procedures.

The skills laboratory opened in 2007, whereas previously the only chance veterinary students had of training simple surgical techniques was using dead animals which had been donated for teaching purposes.

Experience shows that such training is not sufficient to alleviate the students' anxiety and sense of insecurity when subsequently having to operate on living [animals](#).

The title of the PhD thesis is: "Emotions in the veterinary surgical learning environment - with a special focus on [anxiety](#) and the effect of training in a Surgical Skills Laboratory".

Provided by University of Copenhagen

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